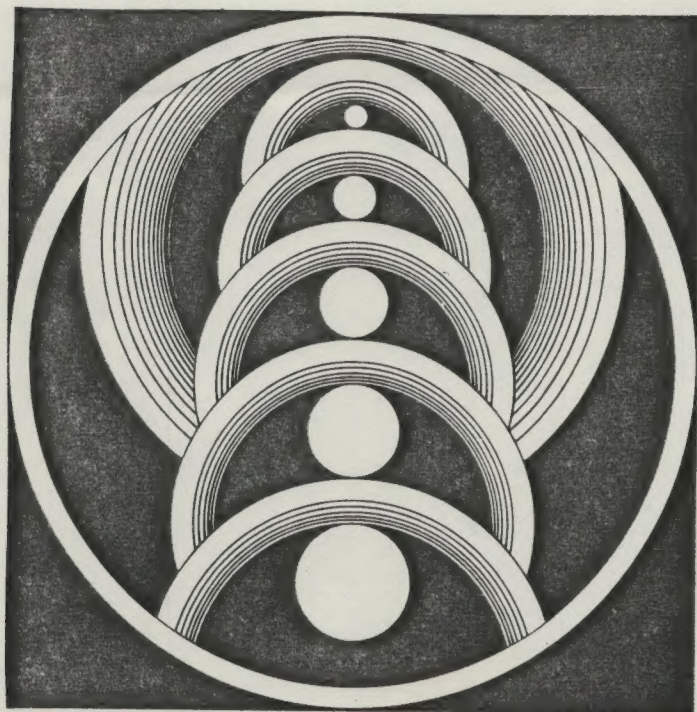


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Out-of-Body Experience:

Inside or Outside the Body?

by LINDA RAVENWOLF

In an out-of-body experience, is the dreamer really outside of his body, or is the OBE a dream accompanied by the sensation of being out-of-body? Stephen LaBerge, in his book "Lucid Dreaming", proposes that "OBE's are actually variant interpretations of lucid dreams" and that "dream telepathy will provide the basis for an explanation of the occasional accuracy of paranormal OBE vision". Many researchers have similar opinions but LaBerge does a good job of presenting and questioning the evidence. Even so, while reading his book, I came up with more questions.

For example, if you take it for granted that dreams only occur within the cranial activity, then a valid OBE isn't a dream and an invalid OBE is a dream; however, if by "dreams" you mean "any phenomena which we experience when the body is physiologically asleep and the mind is actively creating/perceiving images" then the OBE is definitely a dream whether it occurs inside the body or outside the body. I prefer the latter description since it leaves the nature of dream experience open.

In an OBE, I experience the sensation of being out of body. To me, the question then becomes: has the sensation been correctly interpreted? Is it a mental illusion, or do I experience the sensation because I really am out of body? How can I tell for sure?

Awake, all I know is sensation-- including the sensation of thinking-- and I can never prove my thought, that is, I can't take the thought "a little black dog" and put it on the table to be weighed, measured, and verified by others. Even if my brain were dissected at the exact moment of thinking this thought, the thought can't be found; one electrochemical impulse is pretty much like another. To survive in the world, I have to take my sensations pretty seriously - but I have learned that I can misinterpret them.

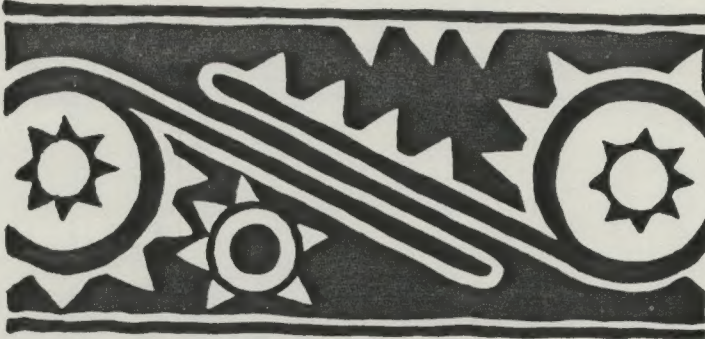
Physicists tell me that matter only appears solid, that it really isn't solid at all. Should I, then, stop deceiving myself and start walking through walls? Should I deny the world of appearance and sensation? Maybe ALL sensation is illusory - an interaction of the nervous system and nuclear forces. Even if this is true, I'd better pay attention to my sensations as long as I want to survive in the sensational world!

(Cont. on page 3)

(O.O.B. continued from page 1)

Sensation is fact. It's a fact that I feel that I'm out of body at times. INTERPRETING a sensation is theory, and interpretations are based on what we already assume to be true. The interpretation may be right or wrong, depending on whether our prior assumptions are correct, but the sensation itself is a statement of fact.

Waking, I can check most of my sensations. That may be a banana peel or a sock lying on the floor, and if I get closer, I can find out for sure. But how can I know for sure that I'm really out of body? Is the current criteria for determining OB validity adequate? Some researchers assume that the environment in which the OB dreamer finds himself MUST be congruent with his waking, physical environment, and that there can be no "dream" elements or incongruities. Why? The assumption seems to be that if an OBE is valid, the person will find himself in exact physical space and time, only outside of his body. But



what if this isn't true? What if, in an OBE, the person is not in the same physical space and time that he would be in if he were in his body?

Examining my own OBE's, I get the impression that if I'm really outside my body, I'm NOT in the exact physical spacetime that I would be in if I were fully in my body.

Rarely, the distortions are minimal: once, fourteen years ago, I became very lucid when I tried to open a door and my hand kept going through the knob. I thought, "Darn, I don't have my (physical) body with me. That means that I'll just have to walk through the door..." The motivation for this OBE was a piece of lemon pie. I had fallen asleep in the nurses's dorm, wondering if they had any lemon pie in the hospital cafeteria - they rarely did, and I didn't want to walk over there for nothing. OB, I saw that they did - then thought, "Well, I can't pay for it and eat it in this condition", and immediately zipped back

to my body, went to the cafeteria, and bought the pie.

Was I OB, or did I pick up the information "clairvoyantly"? If "clairvoyantly", what is clairvoyance? Apparently it's assumed by many that clairvoyance is restricted to something that happens inside the brain. But how does the information get inside the brain? If it's a reception of information, what and how am I receiving? All we know about clairvoyance is that DISTANCE doesn't seem to make any difference, and that the receiver often distorts clairvoyant impressions in line with his own concerns and preconceptions of the moment.

Other researchers allow a few incongruities in the OB environment but demand that if the OB is valid, the dreamer must be lucid. He must question and test the incongruities. Again, why? Why couldn't it be possible to be OB and not know it? Does a three-month old have to understand that he's on an airplane before he can BE on an airplane? When it comes to dreaming, we may be in our childhood, unaware of the kind of world we're in. We don't really know much about the nature of dream reality (though we know much about the biochemical correlates during dreaming).

Testing the validity of the OBE by having the dreamer go to a physical location and report his perceptions is valid only if, in the OB state, a person really is in the same spacetime relation to the physical, or if he is able to intersect closely with it. If he isn't, his perceptions would naturally show either no correspondences or some degree of distortion, depending on how close to the physical he would be.

Usually, we verify data by bouncing our perceptions off others. "Do you see what I see?" "Can the results of this experiment be duplicated by others?" Mutual dreaming has been presented as evidence that the OBE is valid and that inner reality is (or can be) objective. The standard objection to this interpretation is that mutual dreaming could be simply telepathic—however, this counter-explanation really explains nothing at all.

Researchers demand that mutual dreamers report the same details. If they don't, then inner reality is not objective. It's certainly reasonable to expect agreement - to a point. As in mutual waking experiences, there may be some discrepancies. Two people in a room will notice different items. Psychologically,

they may each feel differently about an event. They may argue over the color of an object, its size, or whether it was even present - and I'm talking about waking experience.

In dreaming, this problem seems magnified. Subjective ideas and emotions quickly become events and images, and if it is possible to experience valid mutual dreams, it may take much practice, emotional strength, and skill for dreamers to see exactly the same dream environment. Most of the time, the dreamer's emotional state controls him, and if he does actually meet with others, the contact may be oblique.

What I'm saying is this: we know that dream reality, whatever it is, doesn't go by all the rules of waking reality, yet in the current criteria researchers impose waking standards on it. For example, in waking life two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Is this necessarily true in dreaming? And when I say "dreaming", I am not assuming that I already know it to be "imaginary" or "objective".

Is it possible for two dreamers to be validly present in the same dream, yet one see a mountain and the other a molehill, one a tree and one a bush - according to each one's emotional state and associations? Just as we can defy gravity in dreaming, might two images be able to occupy the same space at the same time? Is the waking sensation of "space" valid in dreaming? What does it imply when we say that the whole of existence must be congruent with our waking experience? At the same time, some principles seem to apply to both waking and dreaming experience. In both we seem to structure our perception and experience according to what we believe and feel.

Mutual dreaming is a real challenge, and it happens most easily among people who have emotional ties and interests in common. From time to time I experience apparent mutual dreams with others, but there are always discrepancies.

A typical example, from one segment of a long dream, is: "I'm putting on a show for Ben (my husband) and Johannes (my son). I'm flying all over the place, doing loops and fancy maneuvers. Ben doesn't seem to be 'all here.'" In the dream, I noticed that his focus seemed slightly off-center, yet he seemed to be watching me. I wondered (in the dream) if the idea of flying disturbed him. The next morning, he enthusiastically reported that I'd put on

quite a show "dancing". I described my arm and leg movements to him and he said, "That's the dancing I saw". But he also saw others in the show, and musical instruments, which I didn't. Why? The discrepancies fit our personality types and interests. He has always been interested in drama and the theatre, and is musically inclined. I am neither; I enjoy music and an occasional movie, but these rarely form the background in my dreams.

Suppose that, if mutual dreaming is valid, a dreamer may not only see what is there, but may also see his projections as well, and "fill out the picture" according to his tastes, interests, concerns, and general temperament? If so, the solution would be for the dreamer to develop greater discrimination (lucidity) and learn to tell which are his projections, and which images he shares with "valid" others - and develop the emotional strength to maintain his focus. It seems to me that this would require a great deal of dedication, but it may be the only way to maintain an "objective" inner reality during a mutual dream.

How can we learn more about the nature of the OBE? Dreamers interested in this subject could (and I am following my suggestions) by: first, developing lucidity and emotional strength (awareness and self-control) in dreams; next, learning dream skills (creating images, learning to discern possible "valid others" from self-projections, experimenting with space, time, movement, and so on. Then, the dreamer can find colleagues who want to experiment with mutual dreaming.

Right now, I confine my mutual dreaming experiments to people I enjoy being with, love, or with whom I share strong interests. It helps if you know them in the flesh - and this may be a psychological aid which won't be important later, but I need it now. I keep an open mind about mutual dreaming with people I'm not close to, or don't know well (or have never met physically), and have had some results. One of the most interesting experiments is to fall asleep with the intent to see whoever wants to see me the most. This approach almost always produces surprising results.

When there are enough skilled dreamers, we'll learn more about the OBE. In the meantime, my conclusion about the OBE is that it's sensational, whichever way you look at it.

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